Roemer urged to give coastal management priority

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ABBEVILLE - LISA will urge Governor-elect Buddy Roemer to place coastal zone management on a priority with fiscal reform in the state.

The decision came during a meeting of the Louisiana Intracoastal Seaway Association executive board called Wednesday in Abbeville by President Elray Schexnayder.

LISA, in the forefront of waterway development programs in Louisiana for more than a quarter of a century, presented an all-encompassing "Strategy for survival" during the 30th annual meeting held in Lafayette May 21. LISA Secretary Vernon Behrhorst and Vice President Sherwood Gagliano made the presentation.

Behrhorst, reporting on the Coastal Zone Management Plan in Abbeville Wednesday, said that coastal erosion was only part of the program.

"There is danger from those who advocate one issue," he warned. "What is needed is a program that is scientifically engineered and physically possible."

He said that many agencies with different proposals have sent representatives to meet with the Louisiana congressional delegation and the message that has come back to waterway developers is "get your act together."

Behrhorst added "We are looking at putting a document on the table prepared by experts in a professional manner. The first step would be to meet with various users of the coastal zone. Just as the fiscal reform movement is described as 'revenue neutral' the coastal zone management plan must be 'ideology neutral'."

The complexities of coastal zone management were underscored by several members of the LISA executive board. A. Phillip Prejean of Houma warned that some erosion of the coastline, including the barrier islands, probably could not be stopped. He said that a long dry spell impacted the water level and redfish were being caught in the Intracoastal Canal within the city limits of Houma.

Merlin Dupre of Franklin estimated that 30 percent of the silting washing down into Louisiana from the midwest was polluted causing damage to shrimp production. Cattlemen want low water, fishermen want high water and duck hunters need enough water to get to their hunting blinds, other members of the board observed.

Behrhorst released a letter to Roemer written Nov. 6 enclosing the LISA proposal on coastal resources management noting that it had been adopted at the Lafayette meeting last May.

"I know the absolute necessity of strong and visible support by Louisiana's governor in any undertaking at the federal level," he told Roemer. "My spirits are renewed by your up-front pledge to do so."

He asked that no action be taken on a proposal submitted by the Corps of Engineers calling Roemer's attention to several proposals pending which address management of Louisiana's coastal resources.

"Ours, on the other hand, provides the solution," Behrhorst advised the governor-to-be. "Furthermore, ours is the only one providing for the evaluation of all components of a management plan within an economic context having only limited dollars available for the massive construction projects that will be required."

Behrhorst recommended to Roemer that any long standing assumption of "deep pockets" for funding be discarded. "We believe these concepts contained in our proposal fit hand-in-glove with your program for managing Louisiana's affairs on a business basis."

LISA board member Locke Mouton recommended a blue ribbon panel be assembled to go over the plan before presentation to the governor. Several of the association members observed that coastal management is a matter of concern to other states and suggested that the Louisiana Coastal Zone Management Plan be established as a pilot program for the nation. The next annual LISA meeting set for May 12-13, 1988 in Lafayette will highlight the project.

In other business at the Abbeville meeting, the LISA board
* Agreed to accept proposals for secretarial services;
* Approved loan renewals with two banks; and
* Heard Schexnayder spell out plans for a LISA membership drive.

The association founded in the 1950s is structured with board membership representing ports and waterways, agriculture and forestry, flood control and drainage, wetlands management, commercial fishing and trapping, industrial and economic development, recreation and tourism. Board members also come from municipal water supply and waste management interests as well as parish governing bodies.